Religion, Support of Equal Rights for Same-Sex Couples and the Australian National Vote on Marriage Equality

Abstract: In 2017, the Australian Government commissioned a national vote on same-sex marriage legislation, which elicited substantial debates dominated by religious voices. We examine the associations between religious identification, importance of religion to one's life and frequency of attendance at religious services and support for same-sex couples in such a unique context. We contribute to knowledge by (i) systematically examining these relationships in a country other than the US (Australia) using high-quality, nationally-representative panel data spanning 2005-2015 (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey; n=44,794 observations/18,384 individuals), (ii) assessing the degree of intra-group heterogeneity in views towards equal rights, and (iii) considering how religiosity modifies the effects of other socio-structural factors. We find high degrees of between- and within-group heterogeneity in support of equal rights for same-sex couples, and large religiosity gradients. Furthermore, religiosity suppresses the liberalising effects on attitudes of historical time, education, socio-economic background, and city residence.

BACKGROUND

Recent debates about recognising same-sex marriage provide a site for the examination of the role of religion in the public sphere. Australia provides a unique opportunity, having recently conducted a national vote to gauge public opinion on same-sex marriage. While the presence of religious voices in public policy debates in Australia have been consistent, the 2017 Australian national ballot on marriage equality emerged as an arena where religious communities actively attempted to dictate what was to happen in the wider society. Religious groups, who in 2016 conducted fewer than 25% of weddings, actively campaigned to limit marriage to heterosexual couples for the whole of society – even though they were (and are) able to privately refuse to marry such couples. This paper offers a discussion of the role of religion in recent debates about same-sex marriage in Australia. Using a large, nationally representative panel study, it provides a detailed analysis of whether and how the views promoted by religious groups resonate with the views reported by individuals who identify with those religions. Specifically, we assess the importance of individual-level variables such as religious identification, religious participation and importance of religion as predictors of support of equal rights for same-sex couples. We make three key contributions to the literature. First, we draw detailed attitude comparisons amongst highly disaggregated religious groups in a new and interesting country context, Australia. In doing so, we question the universality of theories and findings from the US, where the bulk of the research has taken place, and tease out the importance of institutional context (Adamczyk 2017). Second, we discuss and test the degree of intra-group heterogeneity in attitudes to same-sex couples, which we take as a *proxy* for denominational subcultures (Gay et al. 1996). Third, using a 'complex religion' framework (Wilde and Glassman 2016), we consider how religiosity intersects with other social locations in structuring attitudes towards same-sex couples.

Attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ Issues: Religion Matters

A breadth of international research, dominated by US studies, documents associations between individuals' religious identification, attendance and importance and negative attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues (Gay et al. 2015; Sherkat et al. 2010; Whitley 2009). There is also well-established variation across religious groups. In the US, comparatively unsupportive views have been documented amongst evangelical and sectarian Protestants (e.g. Baptist, Pentecostal, Churches of Christ), and comparatively more supportive views amongst Jews, Catholics and mainline Protestants (Gay et al. 2015; Perry and Whitehead, 2016; Schnabel, 2016; Sherkat 2017). Non-US studies remain scarce, but a cross-national literature is developing. A recent analysis of 87 countries by Adamczyk (2017) revealed that Protestants, Muslims and Hindus held the most unsupportive attitudes towards homosexuality, Jews, Catholics and unaffiliated people the most supportive, and Buddhists and Eastern Orthodox Christians fell in the middle. Adamczyk (2017) provides an excellent overview of the theoretical mechanisms underpinning these empirical associations. From a moral-philosophical-theological viewpoint, an important factor is that members of religious groups support social issues that align with the teachings and values of their faith, and – at face value – religious texts often portray homosexuality in a negative way. For example, the Christian Bible's Old Testament condemns same-sex relations as 'detestable' and meriting death penalty, the Islamic Qur'an depicts them as 'transgressive' and 'problematic', and the Hindu Vinaya as requiring penance (Adamczyk 2017: 18-19). Consistent with this, negative attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues are partially driven by literal interpretation of religious scriptures, and beliefs about biblical inerrancy (see e.g. Gay et al. 2015; Perry and Whitehead 2016). The influence of a religious group on the attitudes of its members is contingent on its ability to socialize them into its moral values and instigate conformity, e.g. via sanctioning deviance and other social control processes. Higher levels of attendance at religious services expose individuals to sites in which religious teachings about same-sex relations being sinful or immoral are reinforced, and to greater surveillance by

religious leaders and other congregants; they also reduce the amount of time and effort that they can exert socializing in other circles where more supportive attitudes are normative (Scheitle and Adamczyk 2009). This may explain why high levels of attendance lead to less supportive attitudes about LGBTIQ+ issues. Likewise, religious importance plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes, not just because it promotes attendance, but also because it reflects the degree of internalization of the group's moral values. As Wilde and Glassman (2016: 408) put it *"religion brings about powerful forces of socialization, pedagogy and ritual"*.

Religion and Attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ Issues: The Australian Case

The vast majority of the available evidence on the associations between religion, religiosity and LGBTIQ+ issues comes from the US. This is a significant shortcoming, as the US is regarded as 'exceptional' by many sociologists of religion, having a much higher rate of church attendance and a religious profile dominated by evangelical and charismatic Protestants (Berger et al. 2008). For reasons detailed below, Australia constitutes an interesting comparator. Yet Australian studies considering how religious identity and religiosity relate to attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues are scarce and methodologically lacking. Using data from a panel study of young Australians (*Social Futures and Life Pathways Project*, n=1,836), Smith (2016) found that the importance of religion was a significant predictor of opposition to same-sex marriage. Similarly, using data from waves 1 and 3 of the *Australian Longitudinal Study of Health and Relationships* (2004-2005 & 2006-2007, n=4,884), Patrick et al. (2013) found that religious attendance was associated with disapproval of homosexual behaviour. Using data from a sample of Australians recruited through online social media (n=137), Anderson et al. (2017) found that people who identified as religious (using a 'yes/no' question) were less likely to support same-sex marriage. Consistent with this, Sloane and Robillard (2017) found that religious importance was negatively related to support of same-sex marriage in an online sample of students (n=430). These studies generally feature small or non-representative online

or community samples, which prevents comparing the wide diversity of Australian religious groups and generalizing their findings. A first contribution of this study is to expand the international evidence to Australia using high-quality panel data from a national sample, which allow us to dissect differences in attitudes across finely differentiated religious denominations and individuals reporting different degrees of religiosity. Based on our review of the literature, we hypothesise that in the Australian context: *less supportive attitudes towards same-sex couples will be found amongst those identifying with a religion (Hypothesis 1a) or express higher levels of religiosity (Hypothesis 1b)*. We also predict that *there will be substantial heterogeneity in support across different religions, with individuals who identify with fundamentalist/sectarian Christian groups or Islam expected to hold the most traditional attitudes (Hypothesis 2)*.

Denominational Subcultures: Intra-Group Heterogeneity in Attitudes

A second contribution of this study is to conceptualize and demonstrate the existence of patterned *intra-group heterogeneity* across religious groups in attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues, as a first step in quantitatively demonstrating the existence of *denominational subcultures*. Research has established that the average degree of support towards socio-political issues, such as premarital sex, abortion, or same-sex relations, varies across religious groups. A shortcoming of this body of evidence is the coarse classifications used to measure religious groups. US scholarship on attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues typically compares the 7 groups contained within Steensland and colleagues' (2000) RELTRAND classification (see e.g. Gay et al. 2015; Schnabel 2016). The situation is similar in cross-national comparisons; e.g. Adamczyk's (2017) analyses of *World Values Survey* data used an 8-group classification. Aggregation is usually the result of a lack of information on detailed affiliations, or small sample sizes that hamper comparisons of disaggregated groups (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009: 349, Gay et al. 2015: 3). The degree of aggregation in defining groups is of key importance in

accurately depicting the links between religion and socio-political attitudes: when large groups are used, differences *within* denominations are greater. Our thesis is that, even within highly disaggregated religious groupings, there will be substantial intra-group heterogeneity in attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues. Theoretically, levels of homo/heterogeneity could reflect several factors. First, high heterogeneity could be the product of higher within-group variation in socio-demographic traits: some religious groups are more diverse, e.g. in terms of the members' age and education, which could lead to attitude heterogeneity (Gay et al. 1996). Second, low heterogeneity could stem from isolationist group practices: intense exposure to group teachings, strong penalties for deviance and/or reduced inter-group contact could increase attitude homogeneity (Scheitle and Adamczyk 2009). Third, high heterogeneity could reflect that the group's attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues are in a state of 'flux', e.g. due to cognitive bargaining, strategic rebranding or generational changes: some group members may be transitioning towards adopting attitudes that are societally normative, while others may continue to adhere to viewpoints consistent with the group's and society's historical position (Sherkat et al. 2011). While, in this study, we do not aim to disentangle the causes of intra-group heterogeneity in attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues, our data enable us to compare highly disaggregated religious groups (n=26) both in terms of their average attitudes and, critically, the degree of intra-group dissent. At a base level, we take heterogeneity in attitudes around LGBTIQ+ issues within a group as evidence of the existence of *denominational subcultures* (see Gay and Ellison 1993). Even if we are unable to explain the drivers of intra-group divisions, quantifying them and studying their distribution across denominations constitutes a significant empirical contribution. The existence of internal fragmentation within denominations has important implications, as we will discuss later.

Very few studies have grappled with these issues using quantitative data, and all of these relied on highly aggregated classifications of religious groups. In the US, Gay et al.

(1996) found that the three most liberal religious groups (Jews, Episcopalians, and no religion) exhibited less homogeneity in their attitudes towards homosexuality than other social issues, while the attitudes within the two most conservative groups (Southern Baptists and Conservative Protestants) were highly homogeneous. Similarly, Sherkat et al. (2011) found that sectarian Protestants, the least progressive group regarding attitudes towards same-sex marriage, exhibited the least heterogeneity in opinion. Based on this, we hypothesise that: *there will be substantial heterogeneity in support of equal rights for same-sex couples within different religious groups, but less so amongst groups characterized by greater separation from secular society and stronger sanctions against deviance (Hypothesis 3)*. We add to this limited body of work by expanding its reach to the Australian context, and using a more disaggregated classification of religious groups.

Intersecting Identities: Religiosity as a Moderator in Attitude Formation Processes

A second theoretical contribution of this study is to link conceptual discussions about *intersectionality* with scholarship on religion's influence on attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues. A recent movement within the social sciences emphasises the importance of considering how *intersecting identities* – i.e., *"the idea that individuals possess multiple, competing group identities that shape their life chances and attitudes and behaviours"* (Read and Eagle 2011: 117) – contribute to structuring individual attitudes and behaviours. Individuals develop opinions about socio-political issues based on their identity. Critically, identity is seen here as a multi-faceted and complex construct stemming from not just a single social location (such as social class, gender or ethnicity), but from multiple overlaps across a constellation of these. Religion is one important socio-structural factor contributing to individual identity and, as previously explained, plays an important role in attitude formation. An emerging theoretical approach within the sociology of religion based on *intersectionality* theory, labelled 'complex religion', argues that religion is not independent of other factors contributing to identity and

should examined in interaction with these (Wilde and Glassman 2016). Religion is but *"one of many identity categories that interact to produce mixed, unanticipated, and, sometimes, contradictory outcomes"* (Read and Eagle 2011: 117). Scholarship assessing the role of religion in structuring attitudes has only recently and timidly begun to include this thinking into its 'conceptual toolbox' (Read and Eagle 2011; Wadsworth 2011; Wilde and Glassman 2016).

When individuals have different social identities, beliefs grounded in any one identity co-exist alongside, and compete with, beliefs grounded in other identities (Read and Eagle 2011). We innovate by examining how religiosity and other important social locations intersect to structure attitudes about LGBTIQ+ issues. In advancing their 'complex religion' framework, Wilde and Glassman (2016) highlighted the importance of class and context in shaping the effect of religion. Following this lead, the additional social locations of interest that we consider are indicators of social class (self & parental education) and social context (place of residence & historical time). As argued before, religiosity is theoretically and empirically linked to unsupportive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues (Adamczyk 2017). Yet people who identify as religious in today's society are not a monolithic block, and often embody socio-demographic traits associated with supportive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues. Previous scholarship has documented that higher levels of self and parental education lead to more supportive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people (e.g. through enhancing cognitive flexibility and exposure to humanistic and meritocratic ideals), and that individuals residing in urban areas are also more supportive (e.g., by intergroup contact with LGBTIQ+ people contributing to dispelling erroneous stereotypes) (Armenia and Troia 2017; Perales and Campbell 2018). In Australia, our own calculations using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey (study details below) indicate that, of people who identify with a religion, 23% have University-level qualifications, 22% come from households in which both parents

have University-level qualifications, and 62% live in urban areas. It remains theoretically unclear and empirically untested how religiosity and these socio-demographic traits interplay in attitude formation processes pertaining to LGBTIQ+ issues. Our thesis here is that religiosity will act as an 'anchor' that metaphorically moors the attitudes of individuals who possess other traits associated with supportive views (e.g. University qualifications) towards less supportive stances than their non-religious peers. That is, beyond the well-known *direct* effect of religiosity on attitudes, we pose that religiosity will also *indirectly* reduce support for LGBTIQ+ issues by reducing the liberalising effect on attitudes of other socio-structural factors. Similarly, we also pose that the trends towards more supportive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues documented for society as a whole will be less pronounced amongst religious than non-religious people. This is based on the anti-ascetic hypothesis, which states that the negative effect of religiosity on support of a behaviour should be stronger when the behaviour has widespread societal support (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009).

Surprisingly few empirical studies in the field have grappled with these issues. Wadsworth (2011) paved the way by underlining the importance of intersectional approaches to the study of religiosity and socio-political attitudes. She theorized how intersections between gender, race and religion critically shaped individuals' ideological positioning and activism in California's 2008 same-sex marriage debates around Proposition 8, a ballot initiative designed to eliminate same-sex marriage rights. Using 2006 US data, Read and Eagle (2011) showed that the correlations between religiosity and socio-political attitudes (including attitudes towards homosexuality) varied significantly along racial and gender lines. Similarly, Sherkat (2017) used 2006-2014 US data to demonstrate that the influence of religious identification and beliefs on support of same-sex marriage differed by gender and ethnicity. We expand on this limited body of evidence by undertaking a more systematic analysis of how religiosity and a different and wider range of social locations (self and parental education, urban area residence

& historical time) interplay with each other to structure attitudes towards equal rights for same-sex couples. Our guiding hypothesis is that *religiosity will reduce the liberalising effect of other social locations on support for same-sex couples (Hypothesis 4)*.

Diversity and Change: The Australian Religious Landscape

The uniqueness of the Australian religious landscape and recent changes concerning LGTBIQ+ rights make Australia an interesting case study to test these theoretical premises. Australia's religious profile is very different to those of the US or Europe (Bouma et al. 2010). While non-Indigenous Australia has historically had a predominantly Christian tradition since the British colonial settlement, the Australian religious landscape has transformed significantly over the past 50 years (Bouma and Halafoff 2017). First, there has been a major trend towards religious diversification. Since the early 1990s Australia's in-migration rates have grown, accompanied by a marked change in the most common sending countries: from European countries such as the UK, Ireland and Germany, to Asian countries such as India, China and Vietnam (Betts 2015). Migrants brought their religions into Australia, and so religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism are becoming more prevalent. Today, Australia is a highly multicultural society with a highly diverse religious landscape (Bouma et al. 2010). The 2016 Census revealed that 23% of the Australian population identified as Catholic, 13.3% as Anglican, and 3.7% as Uniting Church. A further 2.6% identified as Muslim, 2.4% as Buddhist, 2.3% as Presbyterian & Reformed, 2.1% as Eastern Orthodox, 1.9% as Hindu and 1.5% as Baptist; combining a range of small Pentecostal and Evangelical groups produces a figure of 3.7% (Bouma and Halafoff 2017). Altogether, Australia displays a very different religious profile than the US. As a result, the classifications of religious groups used in US research (e.g. the RELTRAND classification) are not appropriate to Australia. Second, since the 1970s, there is a marked trend towards secularization (Bouma 2011; Hughes and Fraser 2014). Recently, the percentage of people who did not identify with a religious group in the national Census rose

from 22.6% to 30.1% between 2011 and 2016 (ABS 2017). Declines in religious affiliation have been apparent amongst the Christian groups, particularly Anglicans, Presbyterians and Uniting Church members, but also Catholics (Bouma and Halafoff 2017). Moreover, church attendance in Australia is substantially lower than in the US (Hughes and Fraser 2014). The combination of diversification and secularization makes Australia an important case study to examine the intersections between religious identity, religiosity and social attitudes. Furthermore, Australia is the only liberal democracy not to have a Bill of Rights that frames discussions of civil rights (Robertson 2009). While religious voices in the Australian public sphere have been consistent, the 'tone' of religious arguments in the public realm is shifting to more sectarian and counter-cultural themes. The national vote on same-sex marriage that took place in late 2017 provides a site for the examination of the role of religion in shaping the views on LGBTIQ+ issues amongst the Australian public.

Religious Voices during the 2017 Australian National Vote on Same-Sex Marriage

After several failed attempts by different governments to pass on bills enabling same-sex marriage, in August 2017 the Coalition Turnbull Government announced that it would conduct a national postal ballot to gather public opinion on the subject. The voluntary and non-binding ballot conducted between 12 September and 7 November 2017 asked all Australian citizens aged 18 and over to answer the question: *"Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?"*. If a majority were affirmative, the Government would commit to enable the introduction of a private member's bill to legalise same-sex marriage, which would then be subjected to a conscience vote in parliament. Over 79% of eligible Australians participated in the survey. The results, announced on 15 November 2017, showed support for the 'Yes' case (61.6%) vs. the 'No' (38.4%). In 133 of Australia's 150 electorates, there was a majority of 'Yes' votes. The factor that most strongly predicted the percentage of 'No' votes in a constituency was the share of people identifying with a religion (Livsey and Ball 2017). The

bill to enable same-sex marriage passed with an overwhelming majority on December 8, 2017, and religious leaders expressed disappointment and the desire for (even more) freedom to discriminate against LGBTIQ+ people (Brolly 2017).

Religious organizations were highly vocal, positioning themselves from the early stages of the debate. Their statements and movements confirmed the high heterogeneity in the official and unofficial stances of different groups regarding same-sex marriage and LGBTIQ+ issues. Very restrictive standpoints were taken by the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches, which urged their followers to vote against same-sex marriage. Other groups officially affirmed their understanding of marriage as the union of a man and woman, and/or stated their support for the 'No' case – e.g. the Uniting Church, Seventh Day Adventists, Lutheran Church, Hillsong Church, and National Imams Council representing the Islamic community. In contrast, the Australian Buddhist Council and Australian Council of Hindu Clergy explicitly supported marriage equality. The debates revealed divisions *within* religious groups. An example was the Anglican Church, where an AU$1 million donation to the 'No' campaign made by the Diocese of Sydney was counterbalanced by strong support for a 'Yes' vote made by other senior voices, including the Dean of Brisbane. Similarly, a member of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria quit after the body released a statement urging people to vote 'No', other Jewish organizations such as the ARK Centre expressed their rejection, and the Council's president ultimately apologised and retracted it. In addition, strong pro-marriage equality special purpose movements emerged from within groups whose official positioning was against – most prominently among Catholics and Anglicans (e.g. the Australian Christians for Marriage Equality).

The debate around same-sex marriage elicited by the 2017 national vote constituted an opportunity for Australian religious organizations to take stock and reflect on their stances on LGBTIQ+ issues. It also provided them with an unprecedented chance to influence legislative change and social policy in this domain by deciding whether or not to influence voting amongst

their members, and in which direction. Yet the average attitudes Australians who identify with different religious groups and the degree of intra-group heterogeneity remain poorly understood. The remainder of this paper provides unique empirical evidence on these issues.

DATA

Our analyses use data from the HILDA Survey, an Australian, household panel study which collects annual information from the same respondents since 2001 (Summerfield et al. 2016). The HILDA Survey features a complex, probabilistic sampling design, rendering it largely representative of the Australian population age 15 and older. Our sample is based on HILDA Survey data from waves in which information on support of equal rights for same-sex couples was collected and excludes observations in which respondents had missing information in one or more of the variables used in estimation. This yields an analytical sample of 44,794 observations from 18,384 individuals, observed between one and four occasions.

In the HILDA Survey, respondents are asked about their attitudes toward the rights of same-sex couples through their agreement with the following statement: "*Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples do"*. The question was asked in waves 5 (2005), 8 (2008), 11 (2011) and 15 (2015). To avoid social desirability bias, it was placed within a self-completion questionnaire instead of the face-to-face component of the study. Possible responses were on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' [1] to 'strongly agree' [7] (mean=4.48; SD=2.29). From this, we constructed a dichotomous indicator of support of equal rights taking value 0 ('no support') if respondents fell into response options 1-4 in the Likert scale, and value 1 ('support') if they fell into response options 5-7. This is our outcome variable of interest. Across waves, 52% of the respondents expressed support – with support rising markedly from 40% in 2005 to 66% in 2015.

The HILDA Survey includes questions on religious identification, the importance of religion to one's life, and attendance at religious services. These are our key independent variables. For

privacy, all of these questions were included within the self-completion questionnaire. The questions were asked in waves 4 (2004), 7 (2007), 10 (2010) and 14 (2014). Hence, their values are carried forwards one year to those waves in which information on support of equal rights for same-sex couples is collected. This is statistically convenient, as it offers protection against potential biases due to simultaneity or reverse causation. Information on religious identification is coded to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ABS 2016) at the 3-digit level for Christian groups (except for Greek Orthodox, which is at the 4-digit level) and at the 1-digit level for other groups. This yields 26 different religious groups. In addition to 'no religion' (n=14,409 person-year observations, 32.17% of person-year observations), those with the largest sample sizes are 'Catholic' (n=10,097, 22.54%), 'Anglican'(n=8,674, 19.36%) and 'Uniting Church' (n=3,103, 6.93%), whereas those with the smallest sample sizes are 'Brethen' (n=60, 0.13%), 'Seventh Day Adventist' (n=110, 0.25%) and 'Mormons' (n=112, 0.25%). This largely corresponds to their presence in the Census. Information on the importance of religion to one's life comes from a question asking respondents to tick one of 11 boxes, ranging from 0 (labelled *"one of the least important things in my life"*) to 10 (labelled *"the most important thing in my life"*). The mean for this variable across all waves is 3.48 (SD=3.46), with the most prevalent categories being '0 of 10' (n=13,907 person-year observations, 31.05% of person-year observations), '1 of 10' (n=5,082, 11.35%) and '2 of 10' (n=4,103, 9.16%). A final question asks how often respondents attend religious services, excluding ceremonies like weddings and funerals. Possible responses are: 'never' (n=21,937 person-year observations, 48.97% of person-year observations), 'less than once a year' (n=5,959, 13.30%), 'about once a year' (n=4,553, 10.16%), 'several times a year' (n=4,664, 10.41%), 'about once a month' (n=1,145, 2.56%), '2 or 3 times a month' (n=1,257, 2.81%), 'about once a week' (n=3,921, 8.75%), 'several times a week' (n=1,180, 2.63%), and 'every day' (n=178, 0.40%).

In our multivariate models we control for a set of factors known to affect attitudes towards

LGBTIQ+ issues – see e.g. Armenia and Troia (2017) and Perales and Campbell (2018). These include a continuous measure of respondent's age, expressed in years (mean=46.16, SD=18.24), and dummy variables capturing respondents' gender (53.57% female); sexual orientation, anchored in wave 12 – heterosexual (78.42%), gay/lesbian (1.14%), bisexual (1.00%); and a residual category for other answers (e.g. refuse, don't know, etc.) and missing information (19.44%); highest educational qualification – degree or higher (23.92%), certificate/diploma (30.32%), Year 12 (15.15%), and below Year 12 (30.61%); ethno-migrant background – non-Indigenous Australian-born (77.62%), Indigenous Australian (1.90%), migrant from English-speaking country (9.94%), and migrant from non-English speaking country (10.55%); quartile of household, financial-year, disposable, regular income; socio-economic background, measured by the number of parents with degree-level qualifications– none (32.48%), one (32.40%), two (24.17%), or unknown (10.94%); urbanity of area of residence – major cities of Australia (61.78%), inner regional areas (25.47%), and outer regional, remote and very remote areas (12.76%); and state/territory of residence. All models control also for survey year – 2005 (21.61%), 2008 (22.55%), 2011 (24.52%) and 2015 (31.32%). A full set of descriptive statistics is shown in Online Appendix A.

METHODS

Our multivariate analyses consist of random-effect logistic regression models for panel data. These account for the nesting of observations within the same individuals, include a person-specific random intercept (a random effect) to better account for unobserved effects, and estimate the coefficients on the explanatory variables using a weighted average of the between and within effects (Wooldridge 2010). To allow for non-linear relationships, the explanatory variables denoting religiosity are introduced in the model as sets of dummy variables. A second set of models tests for moderation of religiosity on support of equal rights by adding interactions between the variables capturing importance of religion and frequency of service

attendance, and those capturing year of interview, self and parental education, and rural/urban residence. For parsimony, the religiosity variables in these models were aggregated into fewer categories.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Main Effects of Religious Identity and Religiosity

In this section we discuss the results of multivariate random-effect logistic regression models estimating the impact of religious identification and religiosity on support of equal rights for same-sex couples in Australia over the 2005 to 2015 time period. The full set of estimates from these models is available in Online Appendix B. Here, we present key results visually, as predicted probabilities.

<FIGURES 1 & 2 HERE>

Figure 1 reveals vast differences in the degree of support of equal rights across religious groups, *ceteris paribus*. The highest support levels are observed amongst those who identify as Jewish (predicted probability [PP]=89.4%), other religion (PP=86.8%), other non-Christian (PP=85.0%), Buddhist (PP=78.4%) and multiple religions (PP=77.7%), as well as those with no religion (PP=81.6%). All these rates are over the sample mean support; 52.3% (horizontal dashed line), and the mean support by people identifying with a religion; 44.4% (horizontal dotted line). Support amongst Catholics (the largest religious group) was identical to the national average, even though there was strong teaching and direction to oppose. Anglicans, the second largest religious group, had the same level of support as the mean for those identifying with a religion. The lowest support is expressed by individuals who identify as Jehovah's Witnesses (PP=0.4%), Brethren (PP=0.8%), Pentecostal (PP=6.1%), Islam (PP=7.4%), other Protestant (PP=12.1%), Churches of Christ (PP=17.1%), Baptist (PP=17.4%) and Seventh Day Adventists (PP=18.0%). Some of the largest groups, such as Catholics (PP=52.4%) and Anglicans (PP=43.8%), fall in the middle of the support distribution.

Figure 2 reveals a clear gradient in support of equal rights for same-sex couples by religiosity, both when religiosity is operationalized as the importance of religion to one's life (left panel) and the frequency of attendance at religious services (right panel). When religion is of little importance, support of equal rights is high. For example, the predicted probability of support is 79.4% amongst individuals who rate the importance of religion as 0 out of 10, 71.6% amongst those who provide a score of 1, 63.9% amongst those who provide a score of 2, and 59.5% for those who provide a score of 3. In contrast, when religion is of high importance, the predicted probability of support is much lower: 41.5% for a score of 7, 28.5% for a score of 8, 16.2% for a score of 9, and 6.3% for a score of 10. No predicted probability for a given importance score is significantly greater than that for a preceding score, although differences are less pronounced in the middle of the distribution (scores 4 to 6). Similarly, as attendance at religious services becomes more frequent, the predicted probability of support of equal rights for same-sex couples decreases. For example, this is 71.6% for those who never attend services, 51.0% for those who attend several times a year, 10.0% for those who attend once a week, and 3.2% for those who attend several times a week. Those who attend every day (PP=8.6%) are slightly more supportive than those who attend several times a week. This pattern of results holds also when all three sets of religious identity/religiosity variables are included in the same regression model (see Online Appendices C & D), and when the importance and attendance variables are specified as continuous-level predictors (Online Appendices E & F). The coefficients on the control variables are consistent with expectations and previous research (see Online Appendix B).

Heterogeneity within Religious Groups

Our second analysis quantifies and compares intra-group heterogeneity in support of equal rights for same-sex couples across religious groups. We also consider how such heterogeneity correlates with overall group support. To accomplish this, we use the full range of the original

measure of support ranging from 1 to 7. Figure 3 is a scatterplot including each of the 26 religious groups in the HILDA Survey data as an observation. It shows the association between the standard deviation (SD) in the 1-7 scale capturing support of equal rights (Y axis) and the mean support (X axis). This reveals several patterns of interest. First, we observe substantial heterogeneity in support of equal rights within groups: the average SD across all groups is 2.13 (horizontal line), which amounts to 35.5% of the variable's range. Second, there are large differences between religious groups in the SD of the support variable. For example, this is much lower for Brethren (SD=1.40), Jehovah's Witnesses (SD=1.40) and Pentecostal (SD=1.93), than for Salvation Army (SD=2.35), Seventh Day Adventists (SD=2.36) and Mormons (SD=2.40). Third, comparatively lower SDs are observed for groups with both low and high means in support, and comparatively higher SDs amongst groups with mid-range support levels.

<FIGURES 3 & 4 HERE>

Religiosity as a Moderator

Our final analyses consider whether and how religiosity moderates the effect on support of equal rights for same-sex couples of four other factors: historical time, self and parental education, and city residence. This is accomplished by including interactions between each of the religiosity variables and the variables capturing these social locations in multivariate random-effect logit models. For simplicity and ease of interpretation, we present the results graphically as predicted probabilities. Figure 4 shows the results for the measure of religiosity based on the importance of religion to one's life. The pattern of results is similar in all four figure panels: the effect of the socio-structural factors is less marked at higher levels of religiosity, compared to lower levels of religiosity. That is, religiosity suppresses the liberalising effects of survey year, education, parental education and city residence. As an example, in the top-left panel of Figure 4, the difference in support between having University-

level education qualifications and below school Year 12 qualifications is 39.7 percentage points (93.0% minus 53.3%) when the importance of religion is 0 out of 10. However, when the importance of religion is 10 out of 10, this difference decreases to 4.1 percentage points (14.2% minus 10.1%). Similarly, the difference in support between having two degree-educated parents compared to none is 33.9 percentage points (90.6% minus 56.7%) when importance of religion is set to 0, but just 2.1 percentage points (11.4% minus 9.3%) when importance is set to 10 (bottom-left panel). Concerning city residence (bottom-right panel), the difference in support between living in a major city and an outer regional/remote/very remote area is 27.6 percentage points (80.9% minus 53.3%) when importance is 0, but 4.7 percentage points (12.1% minus 7.4%) when it is set to 10. The top-right panel reveals that the gradient in support by importance of religion to one's life has become more pronounced over time. Results for the frequency of attendance at religious services are remarkably similar (Online Appendix G).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have used an Australian nationally-representative panel dataset spanning from 2005 to 2015 to examine the associations between religious identification, religiosity and support of equal rights for same-sex couples. This study not only expanded the evidence-base on the religion/attitude link to Australia using more powerful data and methods than those deployed in previous scholarship, it also contributed theoretically to the field by demonstrating that the role of religion is multi-faceted. Simply considering its direct influences on attitudes withholds interesting and important information. To understand the full effect of religion on attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues, one must delve into its complexity by considering intra-cluster heterogeneity (i.e., the existence of substantial variation in attitudes within, not just across, religious groups) and (ii) its intersection with other social locations (i.e., how religiosity affects attitudes indirectly by modifying the effect of other socio-structural factors).

Consistent with expectations, results for our Australian sample revealed that identifying with a religion (Hypothesis 1a) and higher levels of religiosity (Hypothesis 1b) were associated with a lower likelihood of supporting equal rights for same-sex couples. This finding is hardly surprising, as it fits squarely with those from a well-developed body work in the US (Gay et al. 2015; Whitley 2009) and emerging cross-national research (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Adamczyk 2017), as well as with results from smaller, Australian community samples (Sloane and Robillard 2017; Smith 2016). These results go to show that strong religion/religiosity associations emerge also in a highly developed country in which progressive attitudes prevail. Also consistent with expectations, we found substantial heterogeneity in support of equal rights across religious groups (Hypothesis 2). Its extent was perhaps larger than anticipated. At one end of the distribution, fewer than 10% of Jehovah Witnesses, Pentecostals or Muslims expressed support of equal rights, compared to 80% or more of Buddhists, Jews, and people with multiple religions at the other end. The largest religious groups, Catholics and Anglicans, had support rates that fell within the middle of the distribution (with 52.4% and 43.8% support, respectively). This pattern of results is consistent with previous research documenting comparatively low rates of support for LGBTIQ+ issues amongst evangelical and sectarian Protestants in the US (Gay et al. 2015; Perry and Whitehead, 2016; Schnabel, 2016; Sherkat 2017) and amongst Protestants and Muslims in cross-national samples (Adamczyk 2017). However, the degree of between-group dissimilarity in our Australian data appears larger than previously reported for previous US and cross-national studies. For example, in Adamczyk's (2017) cross-national sample, the largest difference in disapproval of homosexuality, on a 0 to 10 scale, was between Jews (7.6) and Protestants/Muslims (8.4).

These divergences suggest that the coarse classifications of religious groups typically used in US and cross-national research may not do a good job in accurately depicting the diversity in attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues that exists across faiths. For instance,

evangelical protestants are often found to have unsupportive views towards these issues in the US (see e.g. Gay et al. 2015; Perry and Whitehead, 2016). If we were to consider a similar group in our Australian data, the pattern of results would resonate with these findings. Combining all protestant groups with evangelical tendencies (in this example: Baptists, Presbyterian, Pentecostals, Brethren, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists), we would conclude that 15.6% of its members express support of equal rights for same-sex couples. However, when considering the separate subcategories, we would observe a great deal of variation in support: from 0.4% amongst Jehovah's Witnesses to 29.3% amongst Presbyterians. In addition, using a detailed classification in a religiously diverse society such as Australia enabled us to provide evidence on the attitudes of individuals affiliated with non-Western religions, which – due to small samples – is rare in US and cross-national research. In this regard, our results reveal comparatively low levels of support of equal rights for same-sex couples amongst Islamic respondents (7.4%), mid-level support by Hindus (40.9%) and high support by Buddhists (78.4%).

In addition to expanding the evidence base to Australia, this study also made important theoretical contributions to the field. One such contribution was the consideration of intra-group homo/heterogeneity in attitudes. Consistent with expectations (Hypothesis 3), we found large divergences in attitudes towards equal rights for same-sex couples *within* Australian religious groups. In some instances, there was more variation within than across denominations. While this pattern of results could be taken as a marker of religious incongruence (Chaves 2010) or syncretism (Woodford et al. 2012), it is also consistent with the idea that religious groups – even if highly disaggregated – host subcultures that differ in their moral stances about LGBTIQ+ issues (Gay et al. 1996; Sherkat et al. 2011). This is consistent with the internal fragmentation that was obvious within Anglicans and Catholics,

amongst other groups, in the debates preceding the 2017 Australian national vote on same-sex marriage.

In our survey data, there were also large and patterned differences from group to group in the degree of intra-group heterogeneity in attitudes. We expected to find that the more fundamentalist and sectarian denominations would exhibit the highest levels of intra-group homogeneity in attitudes. Our results were partially consistent with this postulation: groups such as the Church of Brethren, Pentecostals or Jehovah Witnesses – characterised by isolationist and exclusionary social control practices – were amongst those with the strongest consistency (and negativity) in views. This goes hand-in-hand with US evidence that religious groups least supportive of homosexuality (Gay et al. 1996) and same-sex marriage (Sherkat et al. 2011) display the lowest intra-group heterogeneity in opinion. Yet, somewhat puzzling, other groups characterised also by such practices did not. For example, amongst Mormons or Seventh Day Adventists low levels of support for equal rights co-existed with relatively high levels of internal fragmentation. Another puzzling finding were the comparatively high levels of intra-cluster homogeneity amongst some of the most supportive groups, such as Buddhists, Jews and 'nones'. While this is consistent with earlier findings for the US by Gay and Ellison (1993) and Gay et al. (1996), the processes producing them remain unclear. Altogether, intra-group heterogeneity was related to average support for equal rights in a curvilinear (concave) fashion: groups which expressed the lowest and greatest levels of support displayed comparatively more homogeneity in views than groups falling in the middle of the support distribution. Further research that unpacks these empirical regularities is warranted.

Despite being sometimes unexpected, these findings have significant implications. For example, they help identify those Australian denominations in which deviating from normative views is in itself a normative situation, and those in which it is not. This is important because misalignment between personal and normative group beliefs, including beliefs about

LGBTIQ+ issues, contributes to denominational disaffiliation (Vargas 2012). The findings also suggest that more research is needed to understand group dynamics within highly fragmented denominations, e.g. to understand which other factors play a role in structuring attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ issues amongst their members (see below). It is possible that cohort replacement or cognitive bargaining processes are at play, or that factors at the local congregation-level matter. Finally, the findings also serve as a reminder that successful management of religious diversity requires paying substantial, and perhaps increasing, attention to attitude heterogeneity *within* and not just *across* religious groups.

A final theoretical contribution of this study was to adopt a 'complex religion' framework and examine not just whether religion matters (it does), but *how* religion matters. In doing so, we answered recent calls to pay close attention to how religion interacts with other facets of identity, social location and circumstance (Read and Eagle 2011), and to examine the multiple interaction effects between religion and other intersectional statuses using appropriate methodological techniques (Wilde and Glassman 2016). Consistent with our postulations (Hypothesis 4) and previous studies considering race and ethnicity (Read and Eagle 2011; Sherkat 2017), we found that religion not only has *direct* but also *indirect* effects on attitudes: at higher levels of religiosity, socio-structural factors such as self and parental education, city residence and survey year had little bearing on individuals' views about equal rights. That is, higher degrees of religiosity increasingly supressed the liberalising effects on attitudes of embeddedness in these social locations. The reasons why the effect of religiosity trumps those of these other social locations are not obvious. A possible explanation is that individuals' ability to decide on group membership is more limited for ascribed or difficult-to-change factors – such as social class and context – than it is for religious identification or participation (Read and Eagle 2011: 118). Further research delving into how attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people are formed and negotiated when individuals hold religious beliefs and competing identities

stemming from overlapping social locations is warranted. Either way, these findings are indicative that adopting a 'complex religion' framework is useful in gaining a deeper understanding of how religion intersects with other socio-structural factors in attitude formation processes. They also suggest that religious incongruence fallacies of the sort discussed by Chaves (2010) may emerge – at least in part – due to a failure to operationalize religion in its full complexity. As put by Read and Eagle (2011: 118), *"incongruence can arise when ideas and beliefs grounded in one identity are trumped by behaviours seen as more pragmatic in another"*. Religious beliefs and individual attitudes may appear more congruent when the role of religion is considered vis-a-vis that of other social forces.

The moderation results pertaining to historical time are perhaps particularly important, as they offer a window into the likely role of religion in social change towards acceptance of LGBTIQ+ populations. The 'moral communities' hypothesis poses that, in contexts in which religious individuals are in the minority, religion should be less likely to shape attitudes – as religion constitutes a less integral part of the moral code (Adamczyk 2017). In contrast, the 'anti-ascetic hypothesis' suggests that religion should have greater importance in structuring individual attitudes when a moral issue has more widespread support – as religious beliefs should be more likely to serve as a guide where there are not clear social sanctions (Finke and Adamczyk 2008). Our findings are more consistent with the latter proposition: religiosity matters more, not less, as Australians become increasingly more supportive of equal rights for same-sex couples. Differences in attitudes between religious and non-religious people were less pronounced in 2005 (when support rates were just 40%) than in 2015 (when support rates had grown to 66%). This suggests that, if the current trends towards secularization and societal acceptance of LGBTIQ+ rights continue, Australians who remain highly active in religion will progressively hold more countercultural views – a 'sectarianisation' of religion in Australia.

In his presidential address to the *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Chaves (2010) argued that congruence between individuals' religious beliefs and their outcomes is often erroneously assumed. Therefore, to make causal claims, the onus is on scholars to convince readers that outcomes do in fact follow from religious beliefs. While we refrain from making claims of causality, the alignment between the strong religious voices emerging during the Australian same-sex marriage national vote (Patrick 2017) and the statistical patterns found in the survey data clearly reinforce our case. Together, they suggest that Australians *"consciously reflect[ed] on religion at decision-making moments"* with religious leaders and groups actively campaigning to bring *"certain identities or norms or expectations to mind at the moment of decision making"* (Chaves 2010: 11). This brings us back into the role of religion in shaping social policy.

It is clear that in the years leading to the 2017 Australian national vote on same-sex marriage religion was a major factor in the formation and expression of attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people. Religions play four roles in social policy: objects, sources, critics, and implementers (Bouma 2012). In the 2017 Australian national vote on same-sex marriage, all four applied. Religious groups acted as if they 'owned' marriage and their interpretations of it were the *object* of legislative change. They were also *source* in that they sought to maintain the *status quo*. Religions were also *critics*, in that they felt that too much recognition of LGBTIQ+ rights had already been given, as well as *implementers*, in that they solemnise marriages and insist that faith-based organisations be allowed to discriminate. As for the 2004 US presidential debates around marriage equality (Bean and Martinez 2014: 398) and those surrounding Proposition 8 in California (Wadsworth 2011), Australian religious groups mobilized their followers in an attempt to dictate was what to happen in the wider society – violating the doctrine of religious restraint (Beyerlein and Eberle 2014). Our statistical models enable us to offer interesting counterfactuals; e.g., if everyone in Australia identified with a religion, the

result of the same-sex marriage vote would have been to reject it. This stresses how in Australia, as in the US, religion remains central to the politics of moral values (Wadsworth 2011).

To conclude, we find that religion remains an important barrier to the social inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people in contemporary Australia. Yet at the same time our findings indicate that simplistic equation of religion or religiosity with homophobia is misguided and ignores important nuances. Studies of and social commentary on the intersections between religion, religiosity and social attitudes need to acknowledge the large heterogeneity in worldviews that exists across, but also within groups. A large share of religious people support equal rights, which goes to show that religiosity and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people are not mutually exclusive and in fact often go hand-in-hand. New empirical research that relies and builds on emerging conceptualizations of how religion intersects with other social locations to shape attitudes and behaviours is needed. Looking ahead, our findings paint a mixed picture about future trends in the social acceptance of LGTBIQ+ people in Australia: while the process of secularization is expected to become a major contributor to embracing equal rights, size increases in religions with highly opposing views will pose challenges.

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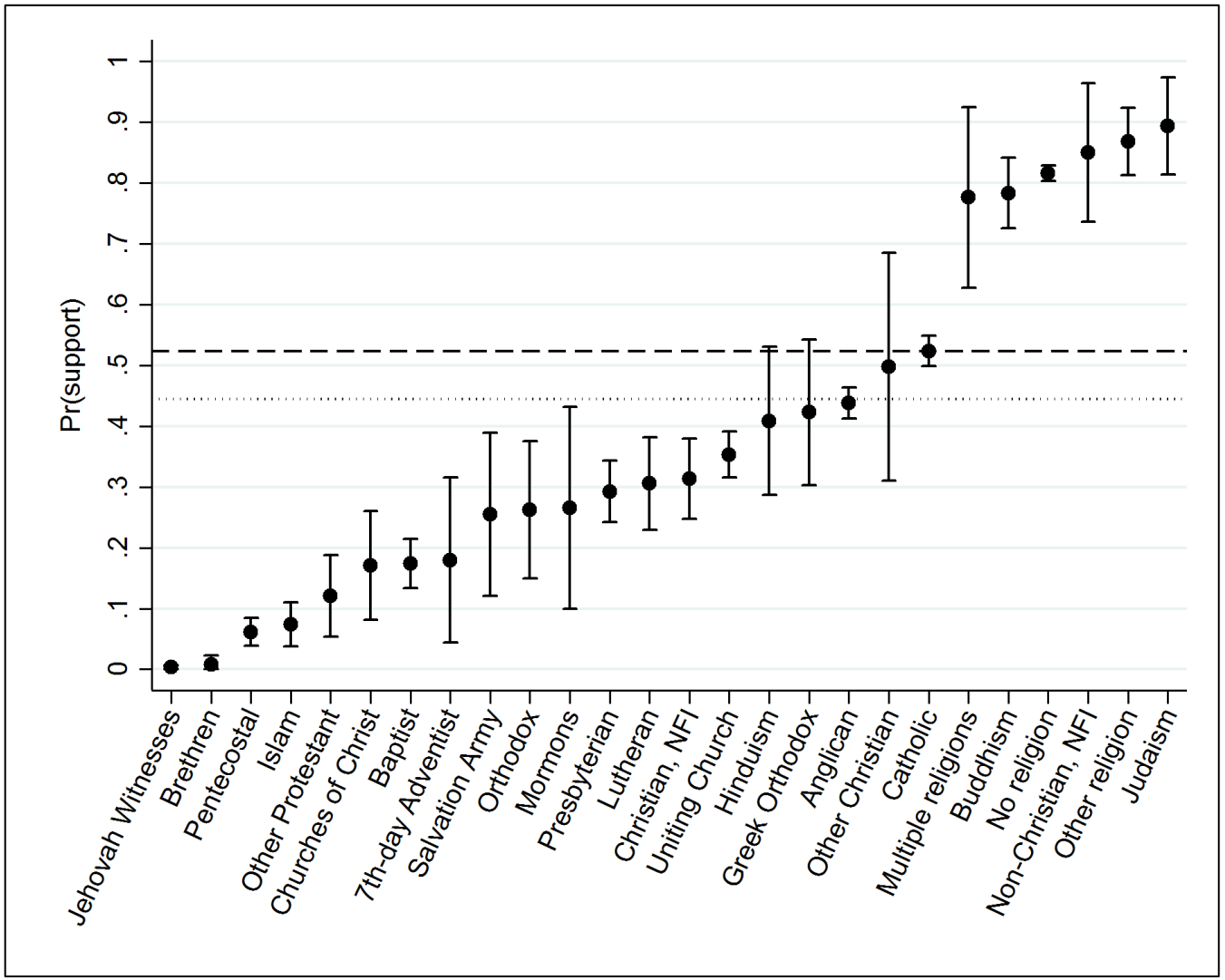
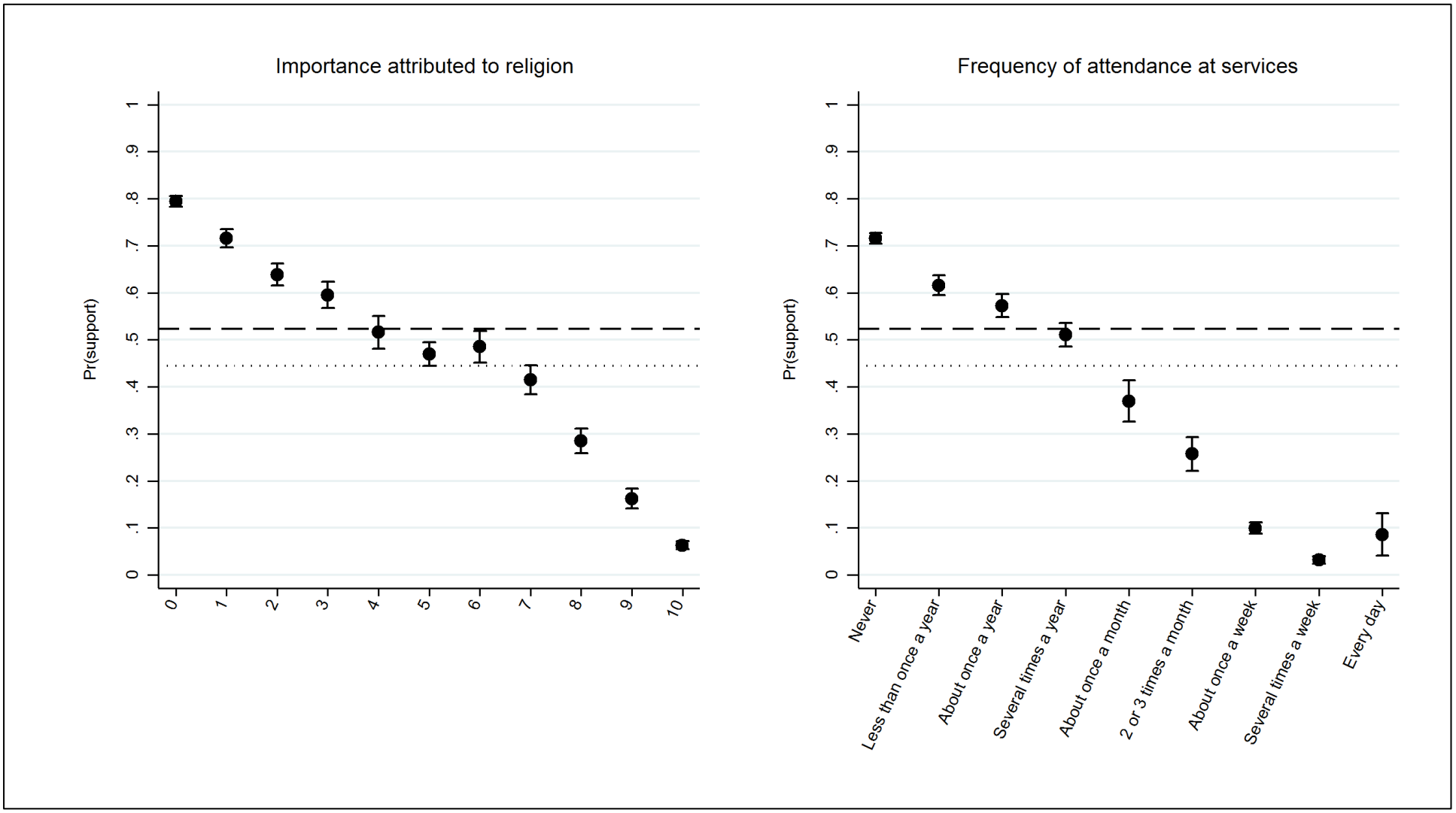
Figure 1. Predicted probability of support of equal rights for same-sex couples, by religious identification



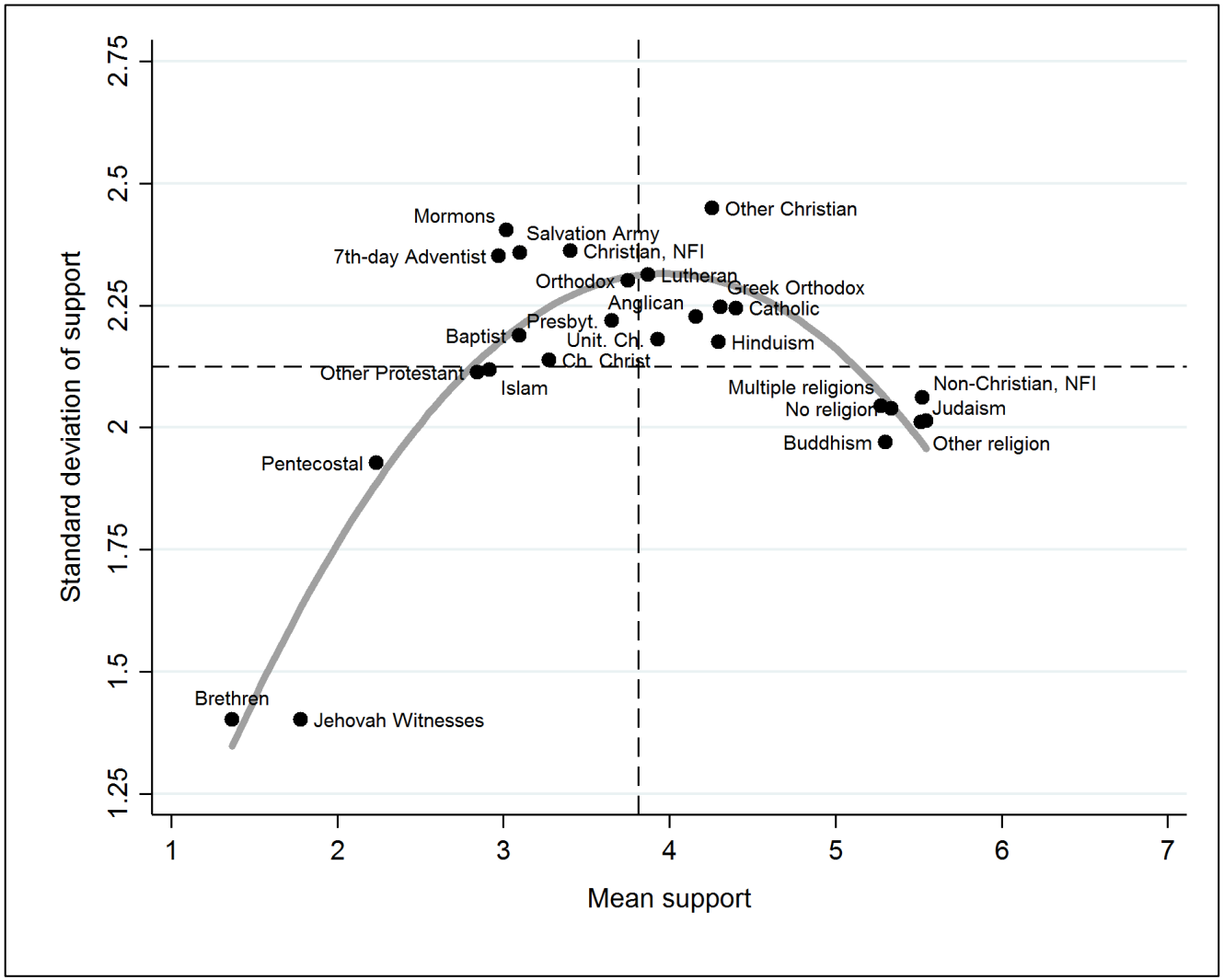
Notes: HILDA Survey, 2005, 2008, 2011 & 2015. Based on estimates from Model 1 in Online Appendix B. Covariates held at their means random effects at zero. The horizontal, dashed line denotes the sample mean support level. The horizontal, dotted line denotes the mean support level excluding those with 'No religion'.

Figure 2. Predicted probability of support of equal rights for same-sex couples, by importance of religion & frequency of attendance at religious services



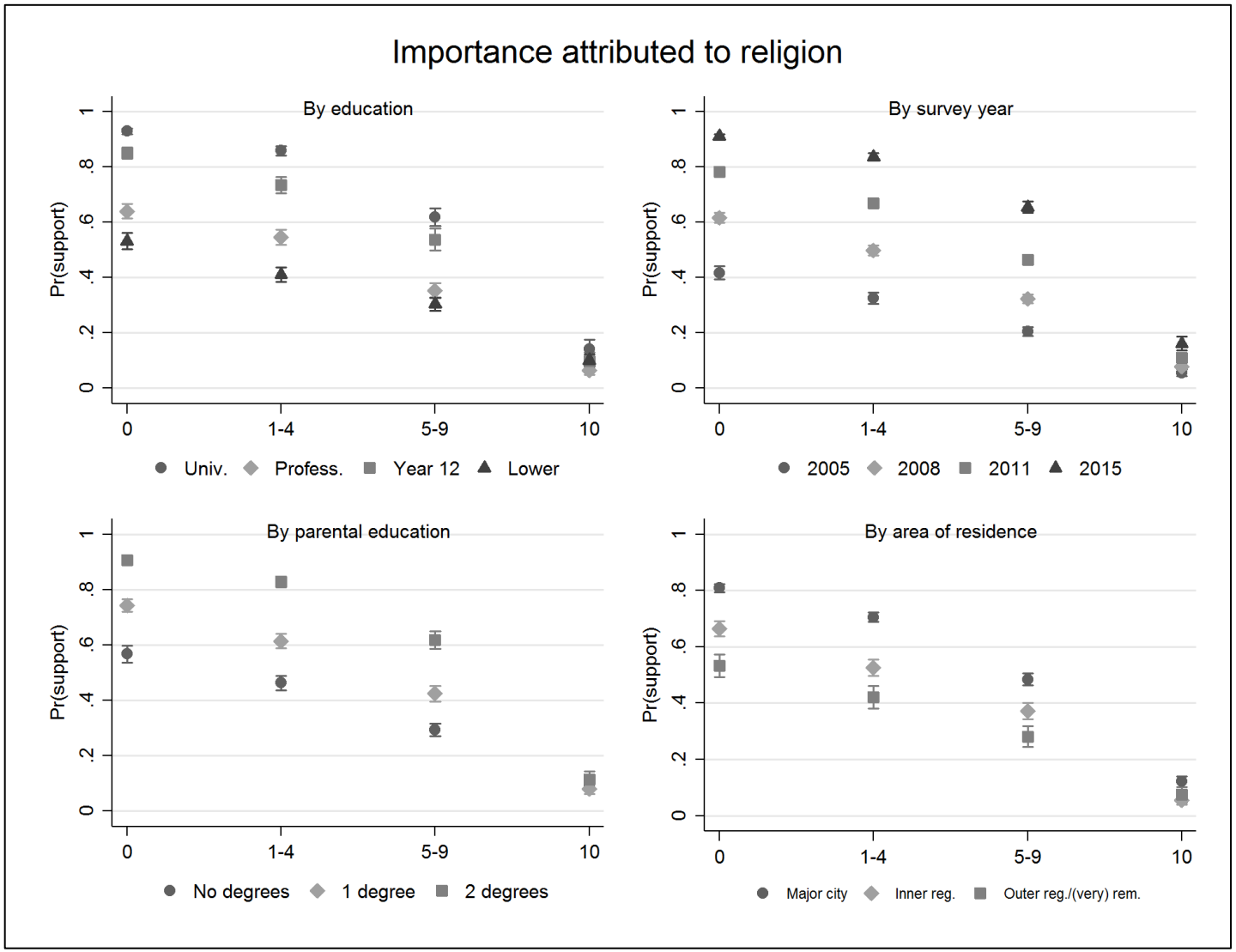
Notes: HILDA Survey, 2005, 2008, 2011 & 2015. Based on estimates from Models 2 & 3 in Online Appendix B. Covariates held at their means random effects at zero. The horizontal, dashed line denotes the sample mean support level. The horizontal, dotted line denotes the mean support level excluding those with 'No religion'.

Figure 3. Mean support of equal rights for same-sex couples (1-7 scale) by standard deviation of support, by identification



Notes: HILDA Survey, 2005, 2008, 2011 & 2015. Unadjusted results. The dashed lines denote the denominational mean SD and support level. The curvilinear grey line depicts their bivariate quadratic fit.

Figure 4. Predicted probability of support of equal rights for same-sex couples, by importance of religion interacted with selected factors



Notes: HILDA Survey, 2005, 2008, 2011 & 2015. Covariates held at their means random effects at zero.